

Blast Theory and Hydrocracker Theatre Company presents...



OPERATION BLACK ANTLER

About the work

Inspired by the revelations about undercover police units infiltrating groups of protesters and activists, *Operation Black Antler* takes every audience member on a journey into a new identity. Become a 'deep swimmer' as you work up your back-story and prepare to infiltrate a far right gathering.

Operation Black Antler begins as soon as you book your ticket. Enigmatic text messages plunge you straight into the murky world of police monitoring units.

At the given date and time you arrive at a secret location: an unassuming flat in the city centre. As soon as you ring the buzzer you are dropped into the hushed purposeful preparations for a major undercover operation. Experienced police handlers welcome you inside and get you a mug of tea. Mugshots pepper the walls. Surveillance kits are being checked.

In a small group a handler briefs you. Intelligence has just arrived that a far right splinter group is recruiting for members in a community event that begins in less than an hour's time. You need to develop a new identity in double quick time and get to the venue.

The handler gathers your name and your background. He wants to know where you grew up, about gigs you've been to and whether you've been in trouble with the law. Using this information he builds a new identity for you. You keep the same first name and from there you build a new persona that can explain your attendance at the gig.

With the clock ticking and the safehouse humming with activity, you plan how to approach your POI (Person Of Interest).

With pulses racing you walk with the two members of your unit to the event a few hundred metres away. A bouncer checks you over before waving you inside. The pub is busy and a band is playing.

With your limited time ticking away, you then choose for yourself how best to get the information you need. As you explore, the story of this new cell spills out around you. The frustrations and dissatisfactions of the powerless in an austerity economy mingle with the adrenaline of a few drinks. You must decide for yourself how far you will go to build trust with these people. If you are especially talented, you may be invited to meet one of the leaders.

Then head to the debriefing space: shed your identity, grab a drink and exchange stories about what really went on during *Operation Black Antler*.

Production

Operation Black Antler requires two venues: the safehouse and the gig. 108 audience members can attend each night in four waves of 27 people. At the safehouse, the 27 are split into three groups of nine as they work up their cover stories.

The cast has seven members: four at the safehouse and three at the gig. The audience at the gig is a community cast of up to 20 people who will be given substantial input through a series of workshops. They will learn about the issues raised in the work; as well as high quality workshops on immersive theatre, acting and building a character.

Operation Black Antler is commissioned by Brighton Festival and Ideas Test and premiered at Brighton Festival 2016

Background

Operation Black Antler conjoins two important and timely ideas.

Firstly, the revelations about the widespread use of deep undercover agents by the UK police since the 1970s including sleeping with their targets and, on more than one occasion, conceiving children with them has shone fresh light on the barely supervised 'off book' nature of police surveillance. Furthermore, they revealed the mental gymnastics required by those agents who attempt to live double lives. Dubbed 'deep swimmers' they spend years immersing themselves in an alternative social and political world. Often living in a different city, travelling frequently, at constant risk of discovery the pressure on them has a long term impact. *Operation Black Antler* examines exactly what the limits are of police surveillance. What is justified and what cannot be justified? Where does your identity start and finish? How easy is it to assume another role? Does the character you adopt affect the core of you?

At a time of widespread international concern about surveillance by the National Security Agency, GCHQ and corporations, this project considers who does the watching and who is watched? And conversely, as the anxiety increases about 'home grown terrorism' are we actually glad someone is watching over us and keeping the world safe for democracy? We want this project to give people an experience where they come out with a fresh perspective on what it might mean to undertake surveillance or be the victim of surveillance

Secondly this work engages with the fallout from the current widespread distrust of politics and politicians. From the British Movement to the British National Party to the English Defence League there is a trajectory that – while centred on hostility to other races and culture - constantly mutates in response to the times. The English Defence League has a Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender division and prides itself on being 'inclusive' and, even, racially diverse. Across Europe issues of difference and the rise of Islamic extremism fuel mainstream parties such as Party for Freedom in the Netherlands and the National Front in France. So, do we get the politicians we deserve? If mainstream politicians and people are so disconnected, is this what fills the gap?

Immersive theatre continues to thrive internationally. For Hydrocracker and Blast Theory, the challenge is to give our audiences meaningful agency within the work we make. We are collaborating together to thrill our audiences with an experience that challenges their understanding of the world around them.

Hydrocracker

Associate Artists of Brighton Dome, Hydrocracker make theatre in non-theatre spaces, immersing audiences in the action. The work is often political, combining the skills of a writer with experienced actors and a specific setting that illuminates the issues at the core of the work.

“Site-specific theatre with a purpose . . . an alliance between formal experiment and rich content.”

Michael Billington, The Guardian.

Hydrocracker has gained a raft of national reviews and a reputation for work that is both ‘up close’ and personal and broad in outlook. Stand out shows include The New World Order - a collage of Pinter plays exploring state repression staged in the corridors and police cells of Brighton Town Hall; The Erpingham Camp - Joe Orton’s brutally funny satire on power and authority set in a holiday camp transposed onto Brighton Pier, and Shakespeare A La Carte - Shakespeare in pizza restaurants!

The company’s core members are highly experienced actors and skilled workshop leaders who have worked extensively with The Globe and NT Education Departments and internationally with major business partners. Hydrocracker’s productions often make use of community casts who are woven skillfully into the action following extensive preparation through workshops and mentoring.

Press

“This kind of imaginative conspiracy shakes one up a bit, makes one look at the world differently”

- Michael Billington, The Guardian

“Thought-provoking and superbly performed immersive experience with a political charge”

- Tim Bano, The Stage

“Unmissable stuff, beautifully crafted and delivered by two remarkable companies”

- Andrew Kay, Latest Brighton

“Truly exciting theatrical experience”

- Tanushka Gill, Morning Star

“Highlight of the piece – The whole thing from start to finish was a masterpiece – more of this please!”

- Ginger Wig and Strolling Man

Blast Theory

Blast Theory make interactive artworks that invite you to question your place in society.

The group is renowned internationally as one of the most adventurous artists’ groups using interactive media, creating groundbreaking new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the internet, live performance and digital broadcasting. Led by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj, the group’s work explores interactivity and the social and political aspects of technology. Blast Theory has shown work at the Venice Biennale, Sundance Film Festival, ICC in Tokyo, the Barbican and Tate Britain. Commissioners include Channel 4, the BBC and the Royal Opera House. Blast Theory’s first app – Karen – commissioned by National Theatre Wales and The Space launches at Tribeca in 2015.

The artists work closely with researchers and scientists and have collaborated with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham since 1997, co-authoring over 45 research papers. The artists teach and lecture internationally including at the Sorbonne, Stanford University and the Royal College of Art. They curated the Screen series for Live Culture at Tate Modern. The group has been nominated for four BAFTAs and won the Golden Nica at Prix Ars Electronica.

Contact

Matt Adams, Director

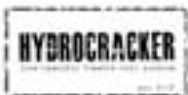
Tel: +44(0)1273 413 455

Email: matt@blasttheory.co.uk

Twitter: @blasttheory

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BlastTheory

www.blasttheory.co.uk



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